

Anne-Marie Creamer's OPENING INTRODUCTION TO BSR
DONORS DINNER, FEB 19TH 2015

Thank-you for being here this evening. This event marks the third ever screening of 'Treatment for Six Characters', which have so far all been private events. I'd also like to thank my hosts the British School at Rome.

A little over 2 years ago I sat before a panel at the British School at Rome & said, begged really, that I wanted to go to Rome to make a work that took as its subject an un-realised film Italian writer Luigi Pirandello wished to make during the last 10 years of his life. This was to respond to Pirandello's most famous work, the play 'Six Characters in Search of An Author', which premiered at Teatro Valle in 1921. That evening was a disaster for Pirandello, so up-set were the audience they threw coins at him. The play began with a rehearsal for a traditional play that is suddenly interrupted by a family who make the extraordinary claim they are not actors but 'characters' invented by an author who abandoned them. They refuse to leave the stage until their story is told. Pirandello's film was to depict a fictionalized version of the time leading to his play, and underpinning this was an exploration of the ethics of the creative process featuring his encounters with a Roman family who unwittingly become catalysts for his ideas. Pirandello's film was to conclude with a fictionalized account of the historical premiere of his play at Teatro Valle so that together the two works form a kind of inverted temporal loop linked by the stage at Teatro Valle, which Pirandello seems to have conceived of as a space of becoming on several levels. There isn't the time to talk about this in detail this evening but I have observed that as well as being linked in subject, *Treatment for Six Characters* is after all a fictional prologue to the more famous play, it also seems to serve as something of a structural reversal of *Six Characters*. Pirandello tried, without success, to get *Treatment for Six Characters* made many times. But he failed. During a scholarship at the British School at Rome in autumn 2012 I set out to find a way to finally make Pirandello's film.

In order for me to do this I needed to gain access to Pirandello's home in Rome, which you will shortly see; the rooms and objects of his home in Rome feature strongly in my film. I show the pen and type-writer Pirandello might have used to write *Treatment*, also his bed, his books and his personal objects. I also got access to the fashion atelier, the Micol Fontana Fondazione in Rome, which became the rooms of Madame Melloni's fashion atelier, (the precursor to Madame Pace). In fact the fashion atelier turned out to be the most difficult place for me to access in Rome; If had more time I could recite stories if my meeting with Haute Couture Art Director on the Via Veneto that seemed right out of the film *Dolce Vita*. Now you might be surprised to hear the lesser known links the BSR has to the fashion industry in Rome, an example of the surprising reach of the BSR is that although Cristina Guisti, of the Micol Fontana Foundation, was recommended to me by a Rome based artist when I visited her it turned out she too had worked some years past at the BSR, with a previous curator. She felt fondly towards the BSR and this fact alone acted as a guarantor in my approach to her.

I didn't dare think I would gain access to the theatre, Teatro Valle. Access of this sort would have been a near impossibility for me in the UK, or at the least prohibitively expensive. Added to this Teatro Valle is revered in Rome, as well hosting the premier of *Six Characters* it is a preserved baroque theatre, the oldest working theatre in Rome, and is also the site of several historic premiers by Mozart, Rossini, and others. Freshly arrived on my scholarship, in fact my 3rd evening in Rome, the the BSR's Jacopo Bechi told me that the theatre was under occupation, a fact I didn't know at the time. He suggested that there and then, at 10.30pm, a group of us should visit the theatre - immediately. So, us newly arrived BSR scholars followed Jacopo Pied Piper-like through the exciting darkness of Borghese Gardens right into the middle of the city and the theatre, which incredibly was still open, now operating 24-hours a day under the occupation. I learned that Berlusconi made plans to close the theatre & so outraged were the actors, managers & technicians that they took it over, occupying it & living in it, establishing a radical organization, 'Teatro Valle Bene Comune' -

literally for 'the common good'. This gathered international support; Francis Ford Coppola & Zizek got behind them, they won 2 European awards, & Peter Brook went out to work with them - twice. But they also welcomed me; I went onto film in the theatre, working with their actors & on one memorable morning had complete command of the auditorium & stage, as you will see. But that process began the night Jacopo brought me to Valle. That night for the first time I stood on the stage where the Six Characters had first manifested. I also met some of the actors and historians living the theatre, some of who would later help me access the theatre and help with casting. That night it also came clear that it was now possible for me to work in this place, and maybe also work in a new way. Now, I had gone out to Rome to draw. I was after all the Derek Hill Scholar in drawing and intended to draw Pirandello's lost film, which in fact I have continued to do on my return to London. I say this knowing there are representatives of the Derek Hill Trust present here tonight! But the chance to work in the theatre also brought a new challenge - how to link my drawings to filming in the theatre? I wrestled with that problem for a while and came to realise my initial plans would need to change. Such are the heady heights of the creative process; plans sometimes have to change, especially when I began to realise that I had luck and timing on my side and that through this there is a way to make a more ambitious work than I originally thought possible.

Now, at this point I have to mention the considerable help Jacopo Benci gave me. Such was Jacopo's help that he really should get a credit as co-producer. He really engaged with the work, even translating the Pirandello text from English to Italian for me, helping me also find my main Narrator, Norman Mozatto, and even in the dead of the night translating legal contracts for the actors into Italian. I felt Jacopo really grasped the ambition, shape and potential of my project; it is fair to say that he worked way beyond the strict requirements of his post at the BSR and his generosity, attention to detail and commitment is something for which I will always be grateful. Christopher - if you could pass that along to Jacopo.

I should say that you both will & will not see Pirandello's film this evening. I used to joke with the archeologists at the BSR that I viewed the text I was working with as every bit as much as ruin as the buildings and sites they worked with: that the act of interpretation would necessarily involve translation and adaption. I worked with a text written in the form of a 1930's 'treatment' for a film studio, really a series of prose paragraphs outlining the plot. I adapted Pirandello's text. I wrote a new prologue - a kind of Greek chorus, who directly address the audience about the significance of what you are about to see - & overall decided take a more oblique approach so that apart from one crucial scene you will not see the actors or scenes literally.

I have tried to wrap my film around Pirandello's absent work, which is nevertheless conjured for you by the imagery, sound, and also by the animating voice of Italian actor Norman Mozzato, a veteran actor who had previously worked with famed Russian film Director Andrei Tarkovsky. Perhaps the pivotal moment of the film is the one when finally one of the characters, the Mother, suddenly enters the film. This moment in many ways acts as a point of reversal in my ways, when the Author/ Pirandello, (who was going to act in the film), finally sees the cost his actions, his creative process, has had on a poor working family. And he is appalled. This moment needs to be compelling, visceral even, and it is acted by Italian actress Simona Senzacqua, I think superbly. After the screening tonight I can tell you the the process of filming those scenes was anything but straightforward, being as we were in a theatre full of sleeping protestors. Underlying my approach is my interest in how it might be possible to make cinema without using film in conventional ways, part of my deliberately oblique approach in exploring what can be called a cinema of the mind. I was keen to maintain the essential elements of the story whilst also sustaining a sense in which Pirandello's film remains a kind of phantom.

It has been remarked that the soundtrack to the work is notable; you might be surprised to learn I did most of the sound for this myself. I do not play musical instruments but I bought the rights to an array of sounds, recorded my own, and slowly built the soundtrack you will hear. Even where the images you will see document the sites of Pirandello film, although I hope in a

heightened way, the sound and music fictionalise the film further. But I did work with an Italian sound engineer in London who recorded the voices of the actors you will hear in the prologue and helped me 'sweeten' the soundtrack, really making sure the sound is as professionally produced as possible. That being said this is perhaps the only film in existence, ok arguably, that has been made in Rome and Walthamstow. Those who have seen it have told me its something like an Italian documentary of the 1970's (having never seen one I can't say if this is true), others have remarked its like a kind of horror movie. You will have to decide yourselves! I should also warn you that the film is in Italian, subtitled in English. As I do not speak Italian this nearly killed me! It is just over 30-minutes long.

The seeds created by this project have continued. It is still very early days for Treatment for Six Characters, the work is still in the precarious, fledging stage of making its way out into the world. But so far it has been seen at a private screening event at the Drawing Room Gallery, with Tannery arts, at the Italian Cultural Institute, where I first broached the world of Pirandello scholars. I must say I was expecting them to take a very sceptical approach to the work, after all I adapted Pirandello's words, translated them, and added a prologue entirely of my own making. But they seemed to have embraced me. They seemed delighted some-one has taken the challenge on. In Autumn of this year there will be published two texts, one a comprehensive interview with me about the work for the Pirandello Society of America, which is lovely as the director of the society wrote the book 'Pirandello and Film' which as an important catalyst for me. There will also be an article about the work in the European Pirandello Studio Journal in September this year too. I am also in discussion with a young Rome-based curator, Francesco Bounerba, to stage a group exhibition built around my film. It is early days but Francesco is beginning talks with Macro Testaccio about this. Please cross all your fingers and toes for me! As a result of the interest in Treatment for Six Characters I was invited to take part in a public art project in Puglia, commissioned by Progetto GAP. Last November I developed my second Italian work, The Passing of the Keepers of Salento, working with train keepers

of southern Italy on the event of their role passing into obsolescence.

It is now also the case that this work is part of a larger project. As I said I originally went out to Rome to draw Pirandello's film, which has been happening, & will also make a final work which takes another evening as its subject; just after its Rome premiere *Six Characters* went onto premiere in the UK, in a theatre in Holborn, London, in the hands of a avant-garde Russian director fresh from the Russian Revolution. This Director, Fyodor Kommissarzhevky, was also a colleague and friend of Konstantin Stanislavski. In fact Kommissarzhevky was one of the chief advocates of Stanislavski's ideas in the UK at this time, which was namely, of course, the invention of what would later become Method Acting, when the line between actor and character took on new implications. That theatre no longer exists, although the site does. Eventually I intend that *Treatment for Six Characters*, the drawn version, & that final Holborn work will form a kind of triptych.

To conclude, it is worth noting that it turns out that there was only a brief period in time when it was possible to make this work. In mid-August last year Teatro Valle Bene Commune were forced out of the theatre by the new major in Rome. Although there are plans to sustain the organizational its true to say it now hangs in the balance. So, if I had gone to Rome earlier or was arriving now it would not have been possible to make this work.

Thank-you.

Anne-Marie Creamer